

## **Charles O'Hagan Horne, Sr. House 706 W. Fourth Street**

The story of the Charles O'Hagan Horne, Sr. House is more than the story of an architectural landmark and the people who have lived in it. We can learn many interesting lessons about the history of Greenville and for that matter the history of the "New South" by recognizing the importance of places like the Horne House.

The Horne House was built circa 1916 at a time when Greenville was just beginning to come into its own. After the railroad finally reached Greenville in 1890, the city became a thriving mercantile hub and regional center for the tobacco trade. The following timeline illustrates the flurry of urban development taking place in Greenville during the early twentieth century:

- 1905: public utilities established
- 1907: Evans St. and Dickinson Ave. paved in brick
- 1909: East Carolina Teachers Training School founded
- 1910: many of Greenville's downtown commercial and institutional buildings destroyed by fire but that tragedy also spurred extensive building projects
- 1912: a group of prominent business & civic leaders raised \$60,000 to build the four-story Proctor Hotel at the corner of Evans and Third streets
- 1915: the population of Greenville reached 6,500

To accommodate the influx of wealth and residents, new neighborhoods were built on the edge of town. Beginning in the 1890s, prosperous merchants and businessmen built stately homes in South Greenville and Forbestown, a few blocks away

from the historic commercial core. Unlike the previous era, in which large Victorian houses were often dispersed among modest worker houses and commercial buildings, the early twentieth century residential neighborhoods were "garden suburbs." Garden suburbs were the exclusive domain of middle to upper-middle class families and off limits to the city's African-Americans. In the 1910s, an enterprising investor named Harry Skinner developed a suburb between downtown (to the east) and Greenville Heights (to the west) that came to be called Skinnerville.



In 1916, Charles O'Hagan Horne, Sr. constructed a substantial two-story frame dwelling with a blend of Colonial Revival and Craftsman details at the corner of West Fourth and Jarvis streets in Skinnerville. Horne grew up in Greenville and attended city schools. After graduating from UNC School of Pharmacy in 1910, he returned to Greenville and opened a successful drug store near the courthouse. Horne was an active parishioner at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and eventually served as the first chairman of the Pitt County Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. Charles and Rena Horne raised three children in the house on West Fourth Street.

Like other houses in the Skinnerville neighborhood, the Horne House was designed to be gracious and inviting—to convey a sense of southern hospitality. In front of the house, a magnolia stand, pecan trees, dogwoods, and azaleas provide relief from the climate and entree to the large, gracious Colonial Revival style porch. The front door is flanked by sidelights and has a single-light transom. Inside, the formal greeting area and classically-inspired main parlor anchor an open circulation plan that is ideal for entertaining. French doors link together the central hall, entrance area, dinning room, parlor, entrance hall, and study.. In the first half of the twentieth century, the quaint tree-lined suburbs of Greenville and the New South were havens for family life, neighborliness, and community; but they were also enclaves of racial exclusivity.

In the 1950s and 60s, Skinnerville was transformed from a whites-only suburb into a predominantly African American neighborhood. In 1968, the widow Rena Horne sold the house to Edwin & Leverne Little. The black families who moved into the neighborhood after many of the white families had left carried on the southern traditions of hospitality. Skinnerville and adjacent neighborhoods in West Greenville compromised a vibrant, close-knit community. Neighborhood residents could easily walk to shops, theater, restaurants, and offices on Albemarle Avenue, the historic black commercial district.

By the 1980s, however, Skinnerville and other sections of West Greenville were suffering from disinvestment. Many of the historic Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Queen Anne, and Tudor Revival houses in Skinnerville were allowed to deteriorate. The neighborhood became less safe, placing an even greater burden on the community.

A neighborhood like Skinnerville, which was designed to foster community and geniality, cannot remain inhibited for long, however. In 1990, J.B. and Francine Taft, formerly of Washington, DC, retired in Greenville and have lived in the Horne House ever since. In 2005, Skinnerville – Greenville Heights was designated a National Register Historic District. In North Carolina, owners of qualifying historic properties are eligible to apply for a 30-percent state income tax credit to renovate non-income producing properties. In recent years, Skinnerville has shown signs of reinvestment as new residents move into the district and fix up historic homes.



The designation of the Horne House as a Local Landmark is a valuable contribution to the preservation and promotion of West Greenville’s proud architectural and community heritage. The City’s ongoing efforts to support community-based reinvestment in Skinnerville – Greenville Heights can capitalize on historic assets like the Horne House. Local landmark designation gives us an opportunity to celebrate the legacy of places like Skinnerville and to contemplate a truly inclusive vision for the future of West Greenville.